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Passive smoking doesn't cause cancer – study

SCIENTISTS working for three European tobacco companies said yesterday they could find no evidence that breathing second-hand tobacco smoke causes lung cancer.

Their report contradicts the findings of the British health department, which says one Briton dies every day from passive smoking, and the US Environmental Protection Agency which says second-hand smoke causes 3,000 lung cancer deaths a year.

The researchers said their review of 48 published studies showed that non-smokers exposed to tobacco smoke had no statistically higher risk of lung cancer.

"Breathing environmental tobacco smoke is not the same as smoking a cigarette," Jeffrey Idle of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, who headed the group, told a news conference.

"There is no reason to believe that lung cancer is caused by breathing environmental tobacco smoke."

The review was funded by Philip Morris Europe, British American Tobacco Limited and Rothmans International.

Idle said the group worked independently and without interference.

Their analysis showed that the relative risk of lung cancer for non-smokers was 1.01. A risk of 1.00 would mean no increased risk at all, while one of 2.00 would be a doubled risk.

They did not analyse other problems, such as asthma or heart disease, that other studies link with tobacco smoke.

Marcel Roberfroid, a professor of pharmaceutical sciences at the Universite Catholique de Louvain in Brussels, said what people ate was a bigger factor.

"Poor diet is probably a major cause of cancer as compared to (passive) smoking," Roberfroid said.

People who ate lots of fruits and vegetables and small amounts of fat and meat were much less likely to get cancer, especially lung cancer, he said.

Idle, himself a smoker, said the families of smokers had other differences from those of non-smokers besides inhalation of tobacco smoke. For example, he said, smokers and their families tended to eat fewer fruits and vegetables.

Idle said many components of tobacco smoke were found in higher levels elsewhere in the environment than in second-hand tobacco smoke. Fried foods contained higher levels of benzopyrines, which are known to cause cancer in laboratory animals, than second-hand smoke.

He said his group had been surprised to find how few chemicals remained in smoke exhaled by smokers or released from the end of a burning cigarette. He said 95 per cent of what a smoker inhales is absorbed by his or her body.

Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/yzgj0001

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